

Howard Springs Nature Park



[text+images by Steve Popple]

Howard Springs Nature Park on the outer fringes of Darwin is the Northern Territory's first Nature Reserve.

The main attraction are barramundi which you can see up close in the swimming hole but the Reserve also has a lot to offer from a horticultural perspective.

A permanent source of spring fed water supports a lush monsoon rainforest. The forest forms a narrow band less than 50m wide which contains some of the tallest trees in the Darwin area. Black wattles (*Acacia auriculiformis*) and *Terminalia sericocarpa* create an impressive canopy and dense shade. The palms *Carpentaria acuminata* and *Livistonia benthami* form extensive stands in the forest.

The climbing fern *Stenochlaena palustris* covers the forest floor and provides inspiration to gardeners looking

for a tough shade tolerant ground cover. Close to the main swimming pool are several Banyan figs. These trees are a forest in their own right and any plant lover will find the aerial roots and spreading canopy simply awe-inspiring.

The forest edge is transformed with early wet season rains encouraging a veritable field of swamp lilies (*Crinum angustifolium*). As the wet season progresses a variety of ferns, herbs and fungi emerge within the forest.

Step out from the monsoon forest and you will discover plants which have to cope with six months of hardly any rainfall, frequent fires and drying winds.

Howard Springs Nature Park is open from 8.00am to 8.00pm all year round.

www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks

