

B METRO



TASTE

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Dallas gets a botanical 'T. rex'

Ancient pine once
believed extinct to take
root at arboretum

By **ELIZABETH LANGTON**
Staff Writer

Today, Jimmy Turner becomes responsible for the care and feeding of a botanical dinosaur.

A Wollemi pine tree, one of the world's oldest and rarest plants, is being ceremoniously planted in the Dallas Arboretum's Lay Ornamental Garden at 10 a.m.

The discovery of living Wollemi pines in Australia 12 years ago is considered by many to be the botanical find of the century.

"It's like walking into your backyard and finding a T. rex eating from your dog's bowl," said Mr. Turner, the arboretum's director of horticultural research.

The Wollemi pine belongs to a plant family that may have coexisted with dinosaurs 200 million years ago. Fossils had led scientists to believe that the tree became extinct 2 million years ago.

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LOUIS DeLUCA/Staff Photographer

Dallas park board president C.W. Whitaker inspects one of two Wollemi pines Tuesday that will be planted at the Dallas Arboretum. The facility will be the first botanical garden in the U.S. to publicly display the tree.

Botanical dinosaur to put down area roots

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Then Australian park ranger David Noble found the living trees after rappelling into a deep rainforest gorge in Wollemi National Park.

"Their discovery is a reminder that there are still some mysteries in the world," said Sally McGeoch of Wollemi Pine International.

Fewer than 100 wild Wollemi pines exist in the Greater Blue Mountains area about 125 miles west of Sydney, Australia. Park officials keep their exact location secret, even blindfolding scientists who visit, Ms. McGeoch said.

The Dallas Arboretum is the first botanical garden in the U.S. to publicly display the tree. Wollemi Pine International, the company authorized by the Australian government to breed and sell the trees, chose Dallas because of the staff's dedication to conservation and research, said Josh Schneider of Wollemi Pine North America.

The presentation coincides with the public sale of 10-inch Wollemi pines in the U.S. by the National Geographic Society. That's slightly smaller than the tree on display at the arboretum. The trees are \$99.95 each. Pro-

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Link: Find out more about the Wollemi Pine. DallasNews.com/Extra

ceeds support conservation of the Wollemi pine and other endangered plants.

In Australia, more than 50,000 Wollemi pines have sold since the trees went on sale to the public last year.

Wollemi pines thrive both indoors and outdoors and require little maintenance, Mr. Schneider said. They can exceed 60 feet at maturity — about 50 years — but potting and pruning restrain growth.

Wollemi Pine International started growing trees from clippings and seedlings collected from the wild population in 1998. Spreading the trees to homes, gardens and parks across the world is a key element of the conservation strategy, Ms. McGeoch said.

"You don't often have a very charismatic endangered plant come along. It might be a small moss that nobody's interested in," she said. "But this is a beautiful

PREHISTORIC TREE COMES TO DALLAS

Before it was discovered in the Wollemi National Park in Australia, the Wollemi Pine was thought to be extinct for nearly 2 million years.



THE WOLLEMI PINE

Family: Araucariaceae

Year discovered: 1994

Height: Up to 130 feet in natural habitat; up to 65 feet in cultivation

Growth habit: Fast growing in light, favors acid soils and has survived in temperatures from 10 to 113 degrees.



Wollemi National Park



SOURCES: Wollemi Pine International; National Geographic

TROY OXFORD/Staff Artist

tree. It's almost like the panda of the plant world."

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