



*Jacob Martin with cones of the bunya bunya tree, right*

## GOODIES FROM MERCER

*by Jacob Martin*

**Greenhouse Manager at Mercer Botanic Garden**

Mercer was hit hard by Harvey and we lost many of our structures and plants. Our entire nursery including some of our larger specimen trees floated away. But sometimes you have to find the good in the bad. Some of Mercer's favorite plants helped us do that.

By the end of the flood cleanup we had created a new term for the horticulture industry, flood tolerant. We had some plants survive being ten feet under water for days on end. Some of the new flood tolerant plants deserve some extra focus:

- **MELALEUCA ALTERNIFOLIA** **Australian tea tree.** This tough Mercer specimen is a focal point when you first walk into Mercer. Its trunk sat eight feet under water for multiple days and the tree didn't lose a single branch. This tree faired so well because it is native to swampy, low lying areas in Australia.
- **BUNYA BUNYA TREE.** *Araucaria bidwillii*'s trunk was twelve feet under water and didn't move an inch. Granted, our tree is very large and close to a full-grown specimen. Mercer also has a smaller, younger

Bunya Bunya that was half way under, about fourteen feet under, in our tropical garden. It flourished back out after the flood even though it was full of trash and debris.



*Kumquat, left, makes a pretty landscape tree, as does Melaleuca alternifolia , right.*

*Note: not all species of Melaleuca are flood tolerant but this one is!*

- **KUMQUAT.** One of the tough Harvey surviving plants is currently feeding the Mercer staff. Our kumquat trees in our formal garden were twelve feet under water and full of fruit during Harvey. A couple of them were bent over from the powerful water flowing over them, but they didn't lose their fruit. We propped them back up cleaned the trash out and now we are having an incredibly delicious kumquat year at Mercer.

I could go on and on about different flood tolerant plants at Mercer from camellias blooming now to mountain laurels that lived in a lake for days. This shows us that we should be more aware of the habitats our cultivated plants are native to and learn to try more flood tolerant plants.

\* \* \*