

Green Legacy Hiroshima

VIRGINIA MCNALLY, APRIL 2026. PROFILE 35.



Virginia McNally has been an arborist and horticulturalist at the Parkville campus of The University of Melbourne, Australia for more than 35 years. She is currently the Curator of the System Garden, an active member in Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) organization, and a member of the National Trust of Victoria's, Significant Tree Committee. The University of Melbourne is the regional hub for Oceania for Green

Legacy Hiroshima, which will help us connect and develop relationships with symbolic sites, war/peace memorials and places of faith/interfaith in our region, as well as the need to advocate for peace.

1. Please share your life trajectory and how you came to be at the University of Melbourne.

I originally studied Arts at Monash University in Melbourne, but no career path evolved from that. I became an assistant gardener through an employment scheme and realized that I had found my niche. I loved that I could blend so many of my interests—plants, design, history, science, and the environment—into a job, all while in being in beautiful outdoor spaces. I am glossing over the low pay, often-hard physical challenges and extreme weather conditions we work in, but I loved it. I realized that there was a ridiculous amount that I needed to learn so I went back to university to study horticulture and eventually got a job at Grounds, at the University of Melbourne. My interest in trees grew, and I studied arboriculture and then green roofs.

2. How did you learn about GLH and what does this partnership mean to you, both personally and professionally?

My then colleague, Tim Uebergang, had come back from a meeting of the state members of Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ)

and he spoke of the trees that had survived the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and of a group that was collecting seeds from these trees (GLH) to send to botanic gardens and institutions around the world. A shiver went down my spine because I had not known of the trees and I knew at that moment it would be hard to get the seeds, but we had to try. It took us years to get the seeds to Australia because of our strict biosecurity laws. It would not have been possible without the assistance and perseverance of Green Legacy Hiroshima and the Hiroshima Botanical Garden, to whom I will be eternally grateful.

I have met so many interesting horticulturalists, arborists and amazing people because of my association with GLH. An enduring and enjoyable relationship has developed with our colleagues from Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. We gave them some of the seeds we obtained from GLH and then had friendly competition about who would be the first and then who would get the most seedlings to germinate. I won't tell you who won but we were both successful in producing seedlings from the *Ginkgo biloba* in Shukkeien Gardens.



Dominic Napoleone and Virginia McNally handing over seeds from GLH to Tim Uebergang, Dermot Malloy & Jo Brennan from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

Another professional highlight was visiting Hiroshima in November 2022, where I got to meet Nassrine Azimi and her colleagues at GLH. They were hosting plant scientists and botanic garden experts from renowned institutions in the United States of America, and they very kindly allowed me to tag along while they visited Hiroshima Botanical Garden where they grow many different species of *Hibakujumoku* seedlings to be distributed. We also visited Shukkeien Gardens, with Master Gardner, Chikara Horiguchi, where we had a special stop at the famous mother-tree, a *Ginkgo biloba* which is believed to be one of the oldest *Hibakujumoku* in the city of Hiroshima. Our last stop was Hiroshima Castle where we collected seed from *Ilex rotunda* (Kurogane Holly). It was awe-inspiring to meet so many people who are passionate, knowledgeable and committed to spreading the story of the Survivor Trees around the world.



Master Gardener, Chikara Horiguchi and Virginia McNally at Hiroshima Castle. Delegates from the USA are picking seeds from the Ilex rotunda (Kurogane Holly) in the background

3. What do you think is the significance of having *hibakujumoku* in Australia?

There are some Australians who have complicated feelings about Japan because our involvement with the Allied forces during WW2. Having *Hibakujumoku* in Australia helps us to have conversations about tolerance and the need to continue to advocate for peace and reconciliation in our country. Their presence worldwide encourages reflection on the need for a nuclear-free future while educating people about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

4. What are your hopes for the saplings in the future?

That the seedlings grow into strong, healthy trees that will live long illustrious lives, being a constant reminder of the resilience of nature and humans, while spreading a message of tolerance, hope and peace to the world.

5. Aside from GLH's current activities, do you think there is anything else that can be done for the message of the *Hibakujumoku*, in Hiroshima and around the world?

GLH is doing an amazing job of spreading the word of hope and resilience associated with survivor trees and it should continue doing what it does so well by:

Writing articles, opinion pieces, blog posts and sharing images, videos and infographics to send to print or on-line publications that align with the GLH values.

Collaborating with artists and musicians who work across a range of mediums, who live in different countries, and ask them to express their vision for peace and hope, using the *hibakujumoku* as a theme. Art acts as a universal language that transcends cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries and fosters mutual understanding and empathy.

Promoting GLH's work through digital technologies, particularly social media. 63% of the global population are active social media users, spending on average 2.5 hours per day on different platforms so it is an increasingly important medium for communication. I think it would be beneficial to

develop a range of positive stories and produce content with lots of visual storytelling, detailing the *hibakujumoku* and why it is relevant today and in the future. Messages of hope are crucial on social media because they combat the high prevalence of negative, polarizing, and "doomscrolling" content, while fostering community, and encouraging resilience and potential for positive change across the different social media platforms.

Encouraging people from the GLH partner organisations around the world to talk about the Hibakujumoku at conferences, schools, universities, gardening clubs, senior citizen organisations, botanic garden gatherings and public meetings, to communicate the amazing work GLH and its partners are doing to foster peace, tolerance and resilience.



Virginia McNally speaking about the Survivor Trees at the Botanic Gardens Australia New Zealand (BGANZ) Congress in November 2025