

Plant of the Month - May

by Allan Carr

Banksia oblongifolia

Pronunciation: BANK-see-a ob-long-if-OLE-ee-a

Derivation: *Banksia*, after Joseph Banks, botanist with Lieutenant James Cook on his 1768-71 voyage on the *Endeavour*; *oblongifolia*, from the Latin, *oblongus* – oblong, *folium* – a leaf.

dwarf banksia
PROTEACEAE



Inflorescence (with buds)



New leaf growth



Fruits (with seed follicles)

Banksia is a genus of about 80 species and all except one are endemic to Australia across all states. *B. dentata* is also found in New Guinea. The main concentration is in south-west WA where there are about 60 species.

Description: This plant is a flat-topped, spreading, loosely branched multi-stemmed shrub with *lignotuber. Bark is smooth grey-brown and branchlets are densely *tomentose and reddish, becoming grey as they age. Plants grow to 1 or 2 m in sandy and rocky soils in coastal heathlands and nearby coastal ranges from Bundaberg in Qld to Wollongong in NSW. It is also found on Blackdown Tableland in central Qld. A fire-tolerant plant that sprouts from the *lignotuber after fire damage.

This *Banksia* is related to *B. robur* with which it commonly hybridises and *B. plagiocarpa* from Hinchinbrook Island in north Qld.

Leaves to 100 mm x 20 mm are whorled and leathery with a margin that has widely spaced shallow serrations (sometimes entire), dull green above with soft white down on the undersides. The shape of the leaf which is roughly oblong gives the plant its name.

Inflorescences to 150 mm x 75 mm are brushes of many flowers often with a blue-grey tinge. Small pale yellow flowers open to show long thin *pistils. Honeyeaters and wattlebirds feed on the nectar when flowers are borne from March to August.

Fruits are woody cones with up to 80 large seed follicles to 17 mm wide, deeply sunken with only their tips protruding. These remain on the shrub to shed their seeds after fire releases them.

*lignotuber = a woody swelling bearing dormant buds underground at the base of a plant (New shoots develop after damage to the top of the plant from fire or cutting.)

*tomentose = with a covering of dense, matted woolly hairs

*inflorescence = the arrangement in which flowers are borne on a plant

*pistil = style with pollen receptor (stigma) at the top end and ovary at the bottom end



Habit, various stages of *inflorescences