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Plant of the month: Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon*



Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* is a fast-growing tree that is very variable in height depending on the habitat, reaching 3-45 metres high, with dark, furrowed bark and hairy new growth. The phyllodes (the modified leaf stem that looks like and performs the functions of the leaf) are 6-14 cm long x 1-2.5 cm wide with 3-5 main veins and rounded tips. Often the new growth has bipinnate or fern-like leaves growing from the phyllode tips, similar to the juvenile leaf stage before the phyllodes develop. The flowers are in cream to pale yellow balls on hairy stems, from July to October. The twisted, leathery seed pods to 15 cm long are held on the tree for a long time and contain glossy black seeds with a distinctive reddish funicle (seed stalk) that twice encircles the seed. Blackwoods are found locally at Point Smythe and Tarwin Lower and scattered elsewhere at Venus Bay.

Blackwoods grow taller in deep, moist soils but will tolerate dryness and frost once established. They provide shade, make a good windbreak tree and the wood is prized for cabinet making and stringed instruments. It is bird and butterfly attracting.

Aborigines ate the seeds, used the fibre to make fishing lines, used the timber for weapons and the bark as a water poison to catch fish and as a treatment for rheumatism. Propagation is from treated seed.

Wattles or *Acacias* have recently been reclassified into the *Fabaceae* or pea family. The genus name *Acacia* comes from the Greek *Akakia* for sharp or thorn and the species name *melanoxylon* from the Greek *mel*, dark and *xylon*, wood for the dark bark on the tree. For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.

