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Plant of the month: Coast Ballart *Exocarpos syrticola*



Exocarpos syrticola Coast Ballart is listed as 'rare' in Victoria so we are fortunate that it is locally common at Venus Bay. It is a stiff, broom-like shrub to 3 metres tall, appearing leafless. The ribbed branchlets are often swollen and flattened at the end and the leaves are reduced to small scales. Flowers are also tiny, greenish-yellow, in short clusters, in spring. The shiny, purplish, nut-like fruit sits on a much larger swollen fruiting receptacle (top of the flower stalk) that turns pale pink when mature in summer.



Coast Ballart is semi-parasitic and requires a host plant to which seedlings attach. It grows in well-drained soil in full sun or semi-shade. Propagation is difficult but root cuttings or stem cuttings may be tried. The plant suckers readily if the roots are damaged. Birds are greatly attracted to the ripe fruiting receptacle.



Ballarts belong in the Santalaceae or sandalwood family. *Exocarpos* comes from the Greek *exo*, outside and *karpos*, fruit, referring to the nut attached to the end of the stalk. *Syrticola* means sand-dweller. Photo: Lorraine Norden.