



## Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc

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### Plant of the month: Coast or Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata*



Coast Sheoak showing separate (dioecious) female (dark) and male (in golden flower) plants

Coast Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata* is a small, upright evergreen tree common at Venus Bay, growing to a height of 10 metres, spread 5 metres, usually with a rounded crown. The bark is grey-brown and furrowed. Leaves are tiny pointed scales arranged around branchlets in rings of 9-13, at 2-3 cm intervals. The drooping ribbed branchlets are about 1.2 mm in diameter and up to 40 cm long, dull green with yellowish bands where the leaf scales attach. On male trees, flower spikes begin to swell at the ends of branchlets in autumn and become showy orange-yellow in late autumn and winter. Female trees produce small red and cream fluffy flowers in the axils of their branches in winter. These develop into brown oval seed cones, 25-50 mm long and 220-230 mm in diameter. They are covered in points which split lengthways to release dark brown winged seeds.



Male flowers

Coast Sheoak prefers well-drained soils and tolerates exposed conditions. The wood is used as a specialty timber for furniture-making. Aborigines ate the shoots and young cones and made weapons and tools from the wood. The cones are a food source for cockatoos. Propagation is from seed.

*Allocasuarina* belongs to the Casuarinaceae family and alludes to the similarity of the genus to *Casuarina* (from Malay *casuar* – a cassowary) referring to its fine branches being like the feathers of a bird; *verticillata* is from Latin and refers to the tiny whorled leaves around the branches. For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.