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Plant of the month: Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia*



Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia* is a large bushy shrub to small tree, reaching up to 7 metres in height by 3 metres wide, although generally smaller in exposed areas. Juvenile leaves are opposite, and longer and wider than the mature plant, where the leaves are narrow and dark green, to 19 mm long x 1 mm wide, scattered or in whorls of 3. Masses of creamy-white bottlebrush flowers in dense terminal heads cover the shrub in October to November, followed by stem-clasping capsules containing hundreds of small seeds. These plants line the road leaving Tarwin Lower and produce a showy display in spring. They are also found along Anderson Inlet at the edge of the saltmarsh. Swamp Paperbark is found in the eastern states from Tasmania to Queensland.

Because of its suckering habit, Swamp Paperbark can form a dense thicket, making a useful windbreak or screen. It responds well to pruning and prefers moist soils, although can tolerate dryness once established. It provides shelter and food for birds, butterflies and caterpillars. Aborigines used the papery bark for paintings and blankets, the nectar was used for a sweet drink and the leaves were used to treat colds. Propagation is from seed.

Melaleucas belong to the Myrtaceae or Myrtle Family. The genus name *Melaleuca* comes from the Greek *melos*, black and *leucos*, white referring to the blackish bark and white branches. The species name *ericifolia* comes from the Greek *ereice*, heath and *folia*, leaves referring to the small heath-like leaves. For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.

