

Plant of the Month - January

by Allan Carr

Hibiscus tiliaceus

Pronunciation: hy-BIS-cus til-ee-AY-shus

Derivation: *Hibiscus*, from the Greek, *Hibiskos* – a name accorded by the Greek philosophers to the marshmallow, *Althea*; *tiliaceus*, like a linden tree, genus *Tilea*.

Cottonwood

MALVACEAE



Flower



Habit



Leaves

Hibiscus is a large genus of more than 300 species in subtropical and tropical regions of the world. There are about 40 described species in Australia with a few more awaiting description. Most Australian species are endemic, some of which grow in semi-arid conditions.

Description: *H. tiliaceus* is a large tree to 10 m along mangrove edges, estuaries, dunes and beaches. It is a distinctive tree with a wide spreading crown providing dense shade and often has long low branches close to ground level making it a marvellous climbing tree for kids. I remember a huge old one I used to climb when holidaying at Scotts Point on Redcliffe Peninsula. Aboriginal people used the inner bark to make string for fishing nets and dilly bags. Young shoots and flowers were a food source and by tightly twisting strips of inner bark, the extracted liquid mixed with a little water made an antiseptic for wounds.

Leaves are alternate and heart-shaped to 200 mm by 180 mm, bluish green and often with shades of red. Their under surface is whitish.

Flowers to 100 mm across with five showy yellow petals change through orange to reddish purple as they age. Mostly November to May.

Fruits are rounded woody capsules to 20 mm splitting into 5 segments revealing the 5 mm long brown seeds.



Changing flower colours



Fruits