

Plant of the Month - February

by Allan Carr

Hybanthus stellarioides

Spade Flower

Pronunciation: hi-BANTH-us stell-ah-ree-OID-ees

VIOLACEAE

Derivation: *Hybanthus*: from the Greek *hybos* – hump-backed, *anthos* – flower (refers to the *spurred frontal petal); *stellarioides*: from the Latin *stella* – a star, *oides* – having the form of, like (leaf hairs if present are star shaped). Previously known as *Hybanthus enneaspermus* subsp. *stellarioides*.

In Australia *Hybanthus* is the best represented genus in the Violaceae family. Other species like *Hybanthus monopetalus* which grows locally, have the usual bluish colour of *Violas*.



Habit

Leaves and flower

Developing seed capsules

There are 10 species of *Hybanthus* endemic in Australia with 5 of those being confined to WA and 3 species occurring in Qld. They are perennial herbs or dwarf shrubs and are most frequently found in heathland or open woodland.

Description: This plant is a slender annual herb to 60 cm (usually smaller) occurring on sandy soils in the grass layer of eucalypt forest throughout coastal regions in Qld and south to Coffs Harbour in NSW. It is a host plant for the Glasswing butterfly, *Acraea andromacha*.

Leaves are alternate, green above, paler below and sometimes sparsely toothed. They are narrow and linear to 60 mm by 7 mm with scattered short soft hairs and edges sometimes *recurved.

Flowers are solitary and orange or yellow growing from the leaf *axils in most months but especially from September to February. They have five petals - one large petal to 8 mm x 15 mm, two inconspicuous outer side petals 3 to 4 mm long and two inconspicuous inner side petals to 4 to 5 mm long. The common name arises from the prominent spade-shaped frontal petal.

Fruits are ribbed yellow capsules up to 9 mm long. In the photos on the right and left there are some capsules in the early stages of development.

*spur = usually a hollow projection

*recurved = rolled under

*axil = angle formed between leaf and stem