

Plant of the Month - June

by Allan Carr

Pultenaea villosa

Hairy Pea Bush

Pronunciation: pull-ten-EE-a vil-OH-sa

FABACEAE

Derivation: *Pultenaea*, after Richard Pulteney, 1730-1801, an English botanist, physician and author; *villosa*, from the Latin, *villosus* – hairy.



Leaves, flowers



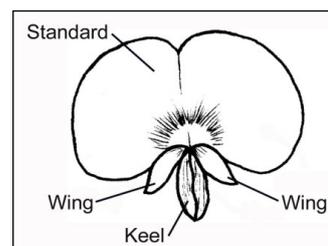
Habit

Pultenaea is a genus of about 110 species prominent in most habitats of southern Australia occurring naturally in heathland and open forests of coastal areas from Bundaberg in Qld to Bega in NSW. A significant number of species occur in sub-tropical regions but are poorly represented in the tropics. They can dominate the shrub layer in a region for a few years following bushfires as they germinate readily after fire.

Description: *P. villosa* is a common hairy shrub to 2 m often with a brownish appearance and drooping branchlets. Stems and leaves have a dense covering of hairs giving the plant a soft characteristic. As legumes these plants form a symbiotic relationship with bacteria of the genus, *Rhizobium*. These bacteria live in root nodules and assist plant nutrition by fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere.

Leaves are alternate and oblong in shape to about 25 mm by 8 mm and crowded at the tips of the stems.

Flowers have the typical pea form consisting of 5 irregularly shaped petals; the "standard", two "wings" and two lower petals joined along their upper edge to form the "keel", as shown in the diagram.



These flowers are about 10 mm across; the standard is yellow to orange with red stripes, (Sometimes these red stripes are absent.); the wings are yellow to orange and the keel is reddish brown. Usual flowering time is from March to November. The Fringed Heath-blue Butterfly lays its eggs on this plant and the caterpillars feed on the flower buds.

Fruits are inflated pods to 6 mm with a tuft of hairs at the apex.