

Plant of the Month - July

by Allan Carr

Phebalium woombye

Woombye Bush

Pronunciation: fee-BAY-lee-um WOOM-bye

RUTACEAE

Derivation: *Phebalium*, from the Greek, *phibaleo* – a kind of fig, but thought to be a Greek name for myrtle when this genus was first described, so the name was chosen because of a superficial resemblance to flowers of myrtaceous species; *woombye*, from the town of Woombye near where it was probably first collected, though I could find no reference to that. The name Woombye is an anglicised Gubbi Gubbi word ‘*wambai*’ which means ‘black myrtle tree’ (*Diospyros pentamera*) the timber of which was used for axe handles. So there were a few twists and turns in the naming of this species!



Habit



Leaves, flowers

There are around 50 species of *Phebalium* of which all but one are endemic to Australia. (*P. nudum* is from the North Island of NZ.) They occur in all states but not the Northern Territory. The majority are shrubs in the small to medium size range of 1-4 m high.

Description: *P. woombye* is a shrub of many branches to 2 m with rusty-scaly young growth found and in the drier parts of the coastal Wallum and heath country of south-east Qld and north-east NSW. There is also a ground hugging form amongst grasses and rocks on coastal headlands and a disjunct population in Eucalypt forest at Canungra.

Leaves to 60 mm x 12 mm are alternate and oblong to elliptical. These firm leaves are dark green above and silver-green with obvious rusty dots below. Their mid vein is indented and they are aromatic when crushed.

Flowers in terminal clusters, often very conspicuous, are borne from June to November. The buds are brown and scaly and open to 12 mm flowers with 4 to 6 petals. Yellow stamens are usually off-set to one side mostly standing up vertically as in the photograph at the right. One source indicated that their nectar is sought by White-cheeked Honeyeaters.

Fruits consist of several segments to 4 mm long containing small, ridged, black seeds.

Pink form

