Plant of the Month - October

by Allan Carr

Billardiera scandens

Apple Berry

Pronunciation: bill-ard-ee-AIR-a   SCAN-dens   PITTOSPORACEAE

Derivation: *Billardiera*, after Jacques-Julien Houton de La Billardiere (1755-1834), a French Botanist who visited south west New Holland and Van Dieman's Land (as WA and Tas were known then) in 1791 (The genus was named by James Edward Smith in 1793); *scandens*, from the Latin, *scandere* – to climb.

Leaves, flower   Ageing flowers,   Fruits

There are around 25 species of *Billardiera* all endemic to Australia with over half of these occurring only in WA. They are all small shrubs or slender climbers.

Description: *Billardiera scandens* is a common and widespread evergreen slender climber with wiry red to brown-grey stems up to 3 m long found amongst shrubs and grasses. It occurs in a range of coastal and near coastal habitats from south Qld to Tas and SA. It is most common in forests and woodlands growing on a variety of well drained soils in a shaded or semi-shaded position.

Leaves are alternate, linear to lance-shaped to 70 mm x 15 mm, sometimes silky hairy below with entire or wavy margins. They are soft to touch but become more brittle as the dense growth matures.

Flowers are single or paired pale cream to yellow, (tinged mauve to purple as they age) attached to a hairy drooping *peduncle. They are tubular, about 25 mm long and each has 5 petals that become *reflexed as the flower opens. Flowers appear at any time but generally during the months of September to January when small honeyeaters gather their nectar.

Fruits are green, fleshy, oblong berries to 30 mm containing many seeds in a sweet pulp. These are usually hairy and change colour to yellow when ripe. They are edible but described variously as unpalatable or tasting like stewed apples or kiwi fruit! They were eaten by Aborigines either in their ripened state or by roasting the unripened fruit.

*peduncle = flower stalk
*reflexed = abruptly curved backwards   Habit