

Plant of the Month - October

by Allan Carr

Grevillea robusta

Pronunciation: gre-VILL-ee-a row-BUST-a

Silky Oak
PROTEACEAE

Derivation: *Grevillea* honours Charles Francis Greville, antiquarian, collector and politician. He was a friend of Sir Joseph Banks and a co-founder with him and five others of the precursor to the Royal Horticultural Society in 1804. *robusta*, from the Latin, *robustus* – strong, robust, mature.



Flowers, leaves,



Bark



Noisy Friarbird at flowers

Grevillea is a genus of about 357 species widely distributed in Australia with all but 7 endemic here. Of these 135 are concentrated in south western WA. A few species are found in New Caledonia, New Guinea and Indonesia.

Description: *G. robusta* is a tall tree to 35 m with an elongated or spreading crown. Bark is grey, hard and deeply furrowed, branchlets angular and rusty-hairy as in the photo with Noisy Friarbird on the right above. It grows on stream banks, in rainforest and vine forest in south-east Qld from about Maryborough, west to the Bunya Mountains and south to Coffs Harbour in NSW.

Trees were harvested extensively in the past for their timber as the yellow-brown attractively patterned wood was highly desirable for furniture and plywood. This species is used often as a rootstock in grafting less robust grevillea species and in plantings overseas in western USA and China.

Leaves to 150 mm x 340 mm are alternate, compound and fern-like with 11 to 31 leathery, coarsely veined leaflets each dissected into narrow lobes which are dark green above, silvery-grey and silky-hairy below. It is one of the few grevilleas that could be considered deciduous as it sometimes drops its leaves just before flowering and during dry or cold times.

Flowers of a brilliant orange-yellow are crowded in toothbrush-shaped racemes to 150 mm long from October to December. They are rich in nectar that attracts a variety of nectar-feeding mammals and birds such as the Noisy Friarbird (*Philemon corniculatus*) in the photo on the right above.

Fruits are brown, oval-shaped, beaked follicles to 20 mm x 8 mm which split along one side to release two flat winged seeds.

*raceme = a simple stalked flower bearing system

*follicle = a dry fruit formed from one flower part



Trees in flower on a Native Plants Queensland excursion