

Plant of the Month - December

by Allan Carr

Brachychiton bidwillii

Pronunciation: brack-ee-KY-tun bid-WILL-ee-eye

Derivation: *Brachychiton*, from the Greek, *brachys* – short and *chiton* – a tunic, (a reference to the seed coat); *bidwillii*, after John Carne Bidwill, botanical collector in Queensland and New South Wales the 1840s.

(‘Kurrajong’ from the Aboriginal Dharug language word, *garrajuŋ* – fishing line, as fishing lines were made from kurrajong bark. The Dharug language is from the Sydney region.)



Leaves (new growth)



Male flower



Female flower

Brachychiton is a genus of about 35 species of large shrubs and trees, most of which occur in tropical parts of Australia in vine thickets and eucalypt open forest.

Description: *B. bidwillii* is an uncommon, highly variable species ranging from a small tree with a single stem to 4 or 5 m to shrub forms around 2 m tall with many stems branching from the base. Bark is pale brown or grey, often finely fissured. This species is *endemic to eastern Qld from about Bowen south to Boonah in scattered locations. It is closely related to *B. discolor* (Lace Bark Tree), with which it will hybridise.

Leaves to 150 mm across are alternate, hairy and deeply 3 or 5 lobed. They are softly hairy on both sides and deciduous during flowering, though plants in drier locations tend to retain their leaves at this time.

Flowers to 40 mm long in compact clusters of 7 to 35 on the branches and trunk are deep red to pink and softly hairy. These have a tubular, bell-shaped *perianth consisting of a single series of 5 fused sepal lobes regarded as a *calyx. Flowering occurs from August to November and flower production increases with age.

Fruits are khaki-coloured, hairy, boat-shaped follicles to 120 mm long containing rows of seeds covered by a brittle hairy coat. The hairs may cause irritation so are best handled with gloves.

Seeds are eaten by the Common Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*) and Crested Pigeon (*Oxyphaps lophotes*).

*endemic = restricted to (a particular locality)

*perianth = calyx and corolla together

*calyx = sepals of one flower collectively



Flowers and fruits