

Plant of the Month - April

by Allan Carr

Melaleuca pachyphylla

Wallum Bottlebrush

Pronunciation: mel-a-LEW-ka pak-ee-FILL-a

MYRTACEAE

Derivation: *Melaleuca*, from the Greek, *melas* – black, *leukos*, – white referring to black fire scars on white trunks; *pachyphylla*, from the Greek, *pachys* – thick, *phyllum* – a leaf.



Red flowered form



Green flowered form

Until 2006 this species was known as *Callistemon pachyphyllus*. The new name has not been accepted by all Australian States. However, the new name is used in Bostock, P D & Holland, A E (eds), *Census of the Queensland Flora 2015*, Queensland Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation: Brisbane.

Description: *M. pachyphylla* is a small to medium sized shrub, usually reaching around 1 metre in height and distributed from Fraser Island, Qld to Byron Bay, NSW. Its common name comes from the sandy, coastal heath habitat which we know as Wallum, an Aboriginal word for the conspicuous *Banksia aemula* of that habitat. A fire-tolerant, hardy plant that will shoot again from the *lignotuber after fire damage.

Leaves are alternate, *oblanceolate, dull green, thick and leathery to 80 mm by 12 mm. They have a prominent mid-rib and are stiff and held upwards as seen in these photos. Young leaves have a covering of silky hairs.

Flowers in terminal spikes to 150 mm by 50 mm have bright red *filaments. These flowers are likely to appear at any time during the year but peak flowering is from July to May. Their nectar is sought by many honeyeater species and Aboriginal people made a sweet drink by soaking them in water.

Fruits are round woody capsules to 8 mm that remain on the plant. Hundreds of tiny seeds are eventually released.

*oblanceolate = lance-shaped but tapering more towards the attached end

*filament = (of the stamen) thread-like structure carrying the anther (the yellow part in these flowers)

*lignotuber = a conspicuous woody swelling bearing dormant buds at the base of a plant.



Flower and the fruits of a previous flowering