

Plant of the Month - September

by Allan Carr

Thelymitra malvina

mauve-tufted sun orchid

Pronunciation: thel-ee-MITE-ra mal-VEE-na

ORCHIDACEAE

Derivation: *Thelymitra*, from the Greek, *thelys* – woman and *mitra* – hat, headband (referring to the hooded column of some species like a woman's bonnet); *malvina*, from the Latin *malva* – mallow (referring to that plant which has mauve flowers).



Buds, flowers



Inflorescence of six flowers



Flowers plus insect

Thelymitra genus has about 100 species, of which 85 named species occur in Australia; others are found in New Caledonia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Indonesia and the Philippines. As a group they are commonly called sun orchids due to their habit of opening widely on sunny days and closing up at night. Their most distinguishing features are found on the *column.

Description: *T. malvina* is a slender ground orchid to 50 cm tall in well-drained peaty wallum sands. Plants grow actively from February to July before flowering and the stem and single leaf die back to the underground potato-like tuber in the hottest months.

Leaf is single, channelled, grass-like to 200 mm x 20 mm and variable in length and width.



Flowers to 25 mm across are blue to mauve and borne in groups of 3 to 15 on stems to 50 cm usually in August and September. They open up wide on sunny days and close at night. Their central *column to 7 mm long is usually blue with a brown band and then a yellow notched top. Brush-like tufts of mauve or pink hairs protrude near the top.

Fruits are egg-shaped capsules to 10 mm x 5 mm across and shed tiny seeds at the advent of hot weather. Seedlings are close to the parent plant and usually only one or two survive.

*column = central part of the orchid flower, formed from the fusion of the stamens and style