

Plant of the Month - October

by Allan Carr

Patersonia sericea

Pronunciation: pat-er-SO-nee-a ser-IS-ee-a

Derivation: *Patersonia*, after Lieutenant-colonel William Paterson, botanical collector and military commander in NSW and Tas; *sericea*, from the Latin, *sericeus* – silken (referring to the fine silky hairs on the bracts).

native iris

IRIDACEAE



Habit



Flower



Open capsule with seeds

Patersonia is a genus of about 20 species with around 18 of these endemic in Australia and 1 or 2 are found in New Guinea and Borneo.

Description: *P. sericea* is a densely tufted herb to 50 cm sprouting from a woody rhizome in sandy wallum heathland and mountain heathland as well as grassland and open forest. It is found from coastal Qld south of Rockhampton, down through eastern NSW and into Vic.

Leaves to 60 mm x 6 mm are basal, flat or round in line on each side of the flower stem. They are blue-green and smooth with edges finely hairy near the base specially when new.

Flowers which open in the morning on sunny days from June to November are purple to 60 mm across with a yellow and white centre. On a leafless stalk are three large purple outer *sepals spreading from a tube surrounded by tough dark *bracts covered in white silky hairs. The three petals are tiny and insignificant. Each flower only opens for a few hours but new flowers are borne over many days.

Fruits are cylindrical capsules to 25 mm long enclosed in the dark brown-black, silky hairy bracts with tiny dark brown, wrinkled seeds visible in the photo on the right above.

P. sericea is a host plant for the eastern iris-skipper butterfly (*Mesodina halyzia*).

*sepal = one of the non-fertile outer parts of a flower that surround the fertile parts

*bract = a leaf-like structure at the base of a flower

Three species grow in south-east Queensland and can be identified by their different bracts.



P. sericea bracts



P. fragilis bracts



P. glabrata bracts