

Plant of the Month - April

by Allan Carr

Eustrephus latifolius

Pronunciation: yoo-STREF-us lat-if-OLE-ee-us

Derivation: *Eustrephus*, from the Greek, *eu* – well and *strepho* – to twist or twine; *latifolius*, from the Latin, *latus* – broad and *folium* – a leaf.

wombat berry

LAXMANNIACEAE



Leaves, flower



Opposite leaves at stem end



Mature fruits, seeds

Eustrephus is a monotypic genus (contains this single species) found in eastern Australia as well as New Guinea and New Caledonia.

Description: *E. latifolius* is a slender, much branched perennial climber or scrambling ground cover of eastern Australia from north Qld through eastern NSW and into Vic. It is usually found in shaded positions and has tuberous edible roots and smooth wiry green stems that sometimes climb over each other.

Leaves to 115 mm x 40 mm are alternate but usually opposite at stem ends. They are bright shiny green above, paler below and have fine, parallel longitudinal veins conspicuous on the underside. Their shape can vary from *ovate to *lanceolate.

Flowers are borne in axillary clusters of up to 10 small pinkish to white drooping flowers to 15 mm across with 6 fringed petals from February to July.

Fruits are globular capsules to 20 mm diameter that change from green to yellow to bright orange as they mature. These remain on the plant for a long period and when mature split open to reveal 3 to 12 black seeds surrounded by a white edible *aril.

This plant is very similar to *Geitonoplesium cymosum* (Plant of the Month - May) but can be easily identified by its leaves with fine parallel veins and no obvious mid vein, fringed flower petals or orange fruits.

E. latifolius is a food plant for the caterpillar of the Ivy Leaf Roller Moth, *Cryptoptila immersana* and the Two-tailed Leaf Beetle *Aproidea balyi*.

In different reference books you may find this plant incorrectly placed in different families such as Philesiaceae or Smilacaceae.

*ovate = shaped like an egg in outline, broadest near the base

*lanceolate = shaped like a lance, about four times as long as it is wide, tapering to a point

*aril = structure wholly or partly covering a seed

Habit with fruits

