

Plant of the Month - August

by Allan Carr

Leptospermum polygalifolium

wild may

Pronunciation: lep-toe-SPERM-um polly-gal-if-OLE-ee-um

MYRTACEAE

Derivation: *Leptospermum*, from the Greek, *leptos* – thin and , *sperma* – a seed; *polygalifolium*, from the Latin, *folius* – a leaf - with leaves resembling the genus Polygala.



Leaves and flowers



Flower with ant



Leaves and fruits

The genus *Leptospermum* known by the common name “tea trees” has about 82 species, 79 in Australia of which 78 are endemic. (*L. scoparium*, the type species for *Leptospermum*, also occurs in NZ.) The three species not found in Australia are in New Guinea, Borneo and Indonesia. Captain Cook’s crew tried leaves of *L. scoparium* as a tea substitute.

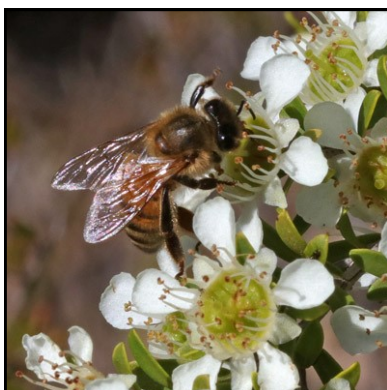
Description: *L. polygalifolium* is a shrub to 4 m, often multi-stemmed in wallum heathland as a result of fire damage. Bark is scaly and close textured. It usually grows on sandy and sandstone derived soils in open forest and on creek banks from Cape York in Qld in a wide coastal band south to Bega in NSW. For many years it was known as *L. flavescens*.

Leaves to 15 mm x 5 mm are alternate and aromatic when crushed, shiny soft green with mostly rounded ends.

Flowers to 10 mm across are white with 5 roundish spreading petals from August to October.

Fruits are domed woody capsules to 8 mm across that stay on the plant for a long period. These have 5 compartments with dozens of tiny brown seeds.

This shrub is valuable to apiarists for the production of honey and is a larval food plant of several moth species.



Flowers with foraging honey bee

Habit in Eucalypt forest

