

Plant of the Month - December

by Allan Carr

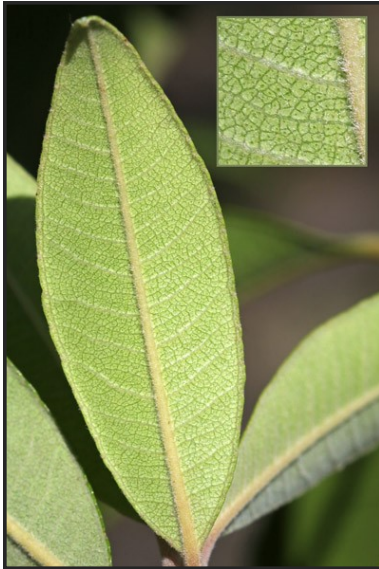
Backhousia citriodora

lemon myrtle

Pronunciation: back-HOW-zee-a sit-ree-oh-DOOR-a

MYRTACEAE

Derivation: *Backhousia*, after James Backhouse, 19th century English Quaker missionary and botanical collector who visited Moreton Bay in 1836; *citriodora*, from the Latin, *citron* – lemon and *odorus* – keen-scented.



Leaf underside with oil dots



Buds, flowers



Habit in a plantation

Citriodora is an Australian endemic genus of 7 species, 6 of which are found only in rainforests.

Description: *B. citriodora* is a shrub or small tree to 15 m, densely foliaged and found in rainforests from Mackay in northern Qld to the Brisbane region. Its bark is grey and rough and young branchlets and leaves are pale green.

Leaves to 100 mm x 30 mm are lance-shaped, opposite and mid-green above with a paler under surface. Edges are slightly toothed and the apex is pointed. Lateral veins are roughly parallel and below the minor veins are crowded and conspicuous with scattered oil dots. When crushed they are strongly lemon-scented and oil distilled from the leaves is used as a food flavouring as well as dried leaves.

Flowers are creamy-white, tiny and 5-petalled to 10 mm across from November to April.

The very attractive white flowers are numerous and produced in long-stalked clusters. Each flower has 5 *persistent spreading *calyx lobes. These are overlaid by 5 small petals about 5 mm long and many fluffy stamens twice as long as the petals.

Fruits are small brownish, 2-celled dry capsules surrounded by the 5 persistent sepals.

*persistent = not shed readily

*calyx = the part of a flower made up of the sepals

Buds, flowers, fruits

