

## Plant of the Month - September

by Allan Carr

### *Melaleuca thymifolia*

thyme honey myrtle

**Pronunciation:** mel-a-LOO-ka time-if-OLE-ee-a

MYRTACEAE

**Derivation:** *Melaleuca*, from the Greek, *melas* – black and *leukos* – white (referring to black fire scars on a white trunk); *thymifolia*, thyme-leaved, a reference to the resemblance of the leaves to those of the genus *Thymus*.



Leaves, flowers



Fruits

There are approximately 240 species of *Melaleuca*, 235 of which are native to Australia. Many *Melaleucas* are susceptible to the myrtle rust pathogen *Austropuccinia* sp. but *M. thymifolia* plants don't seem to be affected so far.

**Description:** *M. thymifolia* is a small shrub rarely exceeding 1 metre in height and is fairly widespread from Carnarvon Range in central Qld through south-eastern Qld to around Ulladulla in NSW. It grows in seasonally inundated wetlands and along creeks in a variety of soils.

**Leaves** to 15 mm x 3 mm are opposite, dark bluish-green above and paler below. When new they are slightly hairy.

**Flowers** in clusters to 20 mm across on the older stems are fluffy and have the distinctive claw shape that shows the united \*stamens which are a feature of this genus. The usual flower colour is mauve or purple but pink and white forms are in cultivation under the names of "Pink Lace" and "White Lace". Flowering occurs from September to February and sporadically, often after rain.

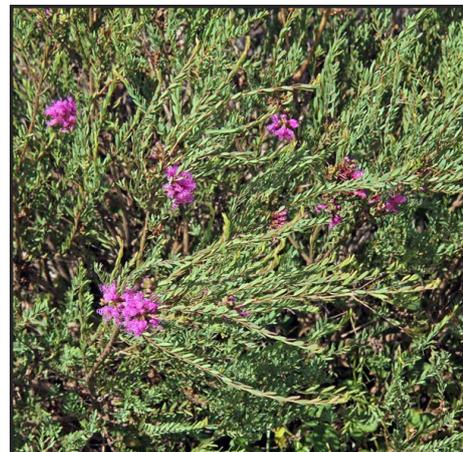
**Fruits** are woody cup-shaped \*capsules to 6 mm across that remain on the plant and contain tiny brown seeds. The flower \*sepals, thickened and \*persistent on the fruits are visible as a crown of small teeth in photo at the right above.

\*stamen = one of the male parts of a flower, consisting of a stalk (filament) and a pollen-bearing portion (anther)

\*capsule = a dry fruit that releases seeds at maturity

\*sepal = a segment of the outer whorl of a flower; all sepals together make up the calyx

\*persistent = not shed readily



Habit