

Plant of the Month - October

by Allan Carr

Burchardia umbellata

Pronunciation: bur-CHARD-ee-a um-bell-ARE-ta

milkmaids
COLCHICACEAE

Derivation: *Burchardia*, after Johann Heinrich Burckhard, a German botanist: *umbellata*, from the Latin, *umbella* - a little shadow or umbrella and the suffix, *atus* - possessive of or likeness to (comparing the flower stalks to the spokes of an umbrella, upside down).



Flowers

Burchardia is a genus of about 6 species endemic to Australia, this one in heathlands and woodlands of eastern and southern states, all the others in WA.

Description: *B. umbellata* is a small, tufted herb to 65 cm with tuberous roots in moist sandy soils. They have a cluster of up to 10 carrot-like tubers under the stems.

Leaves consist of one or two long, partly rolled, grass-like leaves to 60 mm x 4 mm at the plant base plus some tiny stem leaves. These and stems die back after flowering and fruiting.

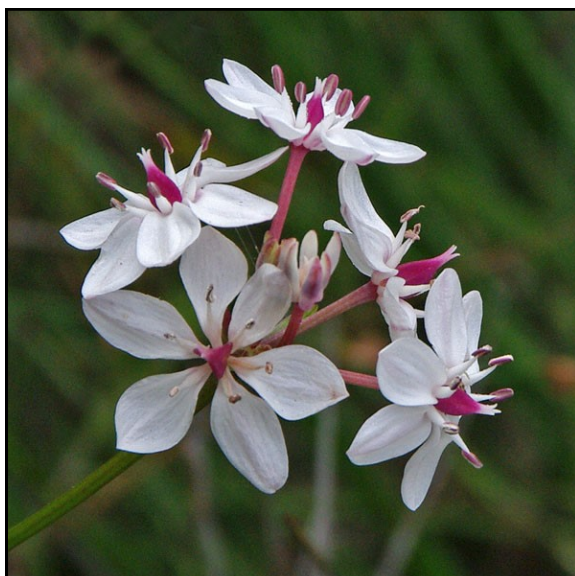
Flowers to 20 mm across are sweetly scented with 6 white *tepals, pink or reddish centres and pale purple anthers. They are arranged in terminal *umbels of 2 to 9 on thin stalks to 60 cm from September to November.

Fruits are papery three-cornered capsules to 5 mm long with many tiny granular seeds.

Aboriginal people ate the thick tubers raw or roasted in the coals. They are white, fleshy, crisp, and starchy, with nondescript flavour.

*tepal = petal or sepal when both these perianth parts are similar in appearance

*umbel = inflorescence where flower stalks of about equal length arise from one point



Umbel of flowers



Papery fruits