

Plant of the Month - March

by Allan Carr

Austromyrtus dulcis

Pronunciation: os-tro-MERT-us DULL-sis

midyim
MYRTACEAE

Derivation: *Austromyrtus*, from the Latin, *australis* – south (related to the genus *Myrtus* but in the south - Australia); *dulcis*, from the Latin, *dulcis* – sweet tasting.



Leaves, flowers, fruit



Flush of new leaves

Austromyrtus now is a genus of just 3 species. Most of the species once placed in this genus are now assigned to *Gossia* and some to *Lenwebbia*.

Description: *A. dulcis* is a common sprawling shrub to about 1 m in coastal sandy areas of heathland, scrub and open forest from Fraser Island in Qld to Byron Bay in NSW. It has flushes of new growth of pink or red leaves later changing to a coppery-bronze hue before becoming green.

As with all Myrtaceae here they are now potentially threatened by Myrtle Rust. Plants growing near where I have removed a rust affected *Chamelaucium* so far seem to be resistant.

Leaves to 30 mm x 15 mm are opposite, *discolorous and hairy below. They are glossy green above, white to greyish below and aromatic when crushed due to dense translucent oil dots below. These are visible with a hand lens.

Flowers are 5-petalled, open and white to 8 mm across with many *stamens and borne from September to March, They are usually solitary or in short *racemes in the leaf axils.

Fruits are white berries to 10 mm diameter covered in small dark purple spots, giving them a pale mauve appearance. They are sweet and gritty due to 3 to 9 tiny, pale brown seeds and delicious with ice-cream and apparently make good jam. In 1836 James Backhouse wrote in his journal, "These are the most agreeable native fruits I have tasted in Australia; they are produced so abundantly, as to afford an important article of food to the Aborigines". Many years ago I remember buying Midyim flavoured Aeroplane Jelly Crystals.

*discolorous = each surface having a different colour

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

*raceme = an unbranched flower stem with flowers on stalks



Bowl of fruits