

“Paying attention is a form of
reciprocity with the living world,
receiving the gifts with open eyes
and open heart.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer



www.castlemaineseedlibrary.org.au

Cover image - Jo Matthews

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Bursaria spinosa
Sweet Bursaria

The Indigenous Seed Project acknowledges the local Dja Dja Wurrung people as the first inhabitants of the land we live upon. We recognise their continuing connection to this land, rivers and creeks and to their rich ancient culture.

We acknowledge that at the time of European arrival the totality of the lands that are now known as Victoria were occupied by sovereign Indigenous nations who owned, cared for and enjoyed their land in accordance with their laws, customs and traditions.

We acknowledge, with full respect, the strength and power of all Traditional Owners, Elder, Ancestors, and young leaders who fight to protect and look after Country, Community, Language and Lore in the face of ongoing colonial interruptions and cultural genocide.

To Learn more please visit djadjawurrung.com.au

The Indigenous Seed Project supports a Treaty for Victoria.

Acknowledgments

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Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Terminology

Indigenous

Refers to a plant species that occurs naturally in a region but not exclusively. For example, River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) is indigenous to our shire but it is also indigenous to many other parts of Australia.

Endemic

Refers to a plant species that grows only in a specific designated area. In Mount Alexander Shire we only have one plant species that is endemic – the Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*), a highly threatened species that occurs only on Mt. Alexander. It is also correct to say that Southern Shepherd's Purse is indigenous to Victoria, or indigenous to Australia, or indigenous to Shire of Mount Alexander.

River Red Gum, which occurs naturally in every state and territory of Australia except for Tasmania, is endemic to Australia, meaning it does not occur naturally in any other country.

Provenance

Refers to the area that the seed was originally collected from. Across Mount Alexander Shire conditions for plants vary from place to place with changes in soil type, altitude, aspect, annual rainfall, frost severity, etc. so where the seed is sourced from influences how well the plants grown from that seed will thrive when they are planted out. For example the summit of Mt Alexander is 430m higher than Castlemaine, receives 2 inches more rain annually, and is granitic in geology whereas Castlemaine is sedimentary so plants grown from seed collected on the mountain would not do so well in Castlemaine and vice versa.

Hello and thank-you for taking some Indigenous seeds to germinate!

The Indigenous Seed Project emerged from the desire to raise awareness of the local flora in Leanganook (Mount Alexander). The project will create the opportunity for anyone to experience propagating indigenous seeds and to also learn about the ecological and cultural significance of the plant they are growing. The accompanying booklets will also provide valuable information about how to use the plant in a garden context and information on growing conditions for each plant.

With only 15% of the local Box Iron Bark forests remaining, it's more important than ever that we get to know these plants and include them in our gardens. This will help extend habitats for the local fauna and make your garden more resilient to future climate changes by using plants that have adapted to local conditions.

I hope you will sit with this little book, read its content and create a connection to the plant/s you have chosen to grow. Perhaps next time you are in the bush you will be able to recognise, name and appreciate these plants deepening your connection to the local environment.

Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Sweet Bursaria

Bursaria spinosa

Family: Pittosperaceae

Description:

Sweet Bursaria is a variable shrub 2m tall x 1.5m, with small leaves and furrowed bark. Generally has a straggly appearance but can be clipped to increase density. Fragrant, creamy flowers borne in dense clusters from November-January. Young plants are spiny. Papery capsules rustle pleasantly in the wind.

Growing Conditions:

Adaptable to most local conditions. Sweet Bursaria is very tolerant of drought. Also tolerant of frost and some water logging. Grows well in part shade to full sun; acid to neutral soils.

Cultivation and Maintenance:

A resilient and generally trouble-free plant with no special attention required. Occasionally succumbs to scale insect and black sooty mold. Resprouts after clipping and can be hedged. Slow initial growth while establishing its large taproot, followed by moderate growth rates. Long-lived (80+ yrs.).



**Eltham Copper Butterfly perched on
Bursaria flower
Photo: Elaine Bayes**

Garden value:

This versatile and trouble-free shrub can be planted under trees or in the open as a screen, hedge or scattered in a cottage or grassland garden. It is a terrific habitat plant, with a fine canopy that offers protection and nesting sites for birds. The creamy flowers attract a huge variety of insect pollinators, including native bees, butterflies, moths, parasitic wasps and beetles.

Ecology:

An important shrub in the understory of eucalypt forests and woodlands and a dominant shrub in grassy woodlands and roadsides. In higher rainfall areas this plant will become a small tree (to 8 m) with larger leaves. It provides food for the larvae of Copper Butterflies, including the locally endangered Eltham Copper. Insectivorous birds forage in the canopy.

Seed collection and propagation:

Collect seed pods from plant in February to March when they are dry. Place in a paper bag, the seeds will separate from pod (see earlier pic). The seeds are sown June/July of same year. If using seed trays and pricking out into tubes: fill seed tray with seed raising mix and water in. Tamp down, creating a firm seedbed (a flat brick is good for this). Spread *Bursaria* seed over seed tray, covering lightly with vermiculite (shattered Mica). Leave seed tray outside in the cold weather. Water gently once a week through winter then every second day through Spring. By November/Dec. seedlings should be large enough to handle for pricking out (e.g. 1cm tall).

Seed collection and propagation cont'd

Carefully separate out one seedling at a time (using a label or similar to loosen the roots) and tube it up into good quality potting mix, making sure roots are kept straight. Put newly pricked out seedlings in a sunny position and do not over-water as they are prone to 'damping off' (rotting).

Seedlings will be ready to plant out in May/June/July of the following year (12 months from seed sowing). Ideally the shoot:root ratio should be between 1:1 to 2:1

When planting make a well around the plant that will hold a whole bucket of water (give each plant a bucketful on planting).

If sowing seed directly into tubes:

fill tubes with good quality potting mix. Water so that potting mix surface is 5mm below top of tubes. Place about 3 seeds per tube (not all seeds will germinate). Cover seed lightly with vermiculite (shattered Mica). Leave box where it will get very cold. Water gently once a week through Winter, then every second day through Spring. In November /December thin seedlings out to one per tube.



The dried seed pods of Sweet Bursaria - Photo Jo Matthews



**Bursaria seed (R) and Bursaria pods (L).
The seeds have a slight kidney-shape.
Photo - Jo Matthews**

Sweet Bursarias and the Eltham Copper Butterfly

Local celebrity, the Eltham Copper Butterfly, has piqued the interest of many people in this community. It's curious to wonder if any other butterflies have a festival in their honor and a song written about them.

(1) Alas, despite their notoriety, the Eltham Copper Butterfly (ECB) is not commonly seen and is listed as endangered under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. We are lucky to have some of the few surviving habitats for this species around Castlemaine.

The reason we have populations of ECB in our area is due to existing populations of Sweet Bursaria, the priority species for the Eltham Copper. The ECBs survival depends on healthy populations of Bursaria as it is the only food source the larvae feed upon. The story is, however, a little more complex than this. Enter the ants, a species of Noctonus who have an intimate and symbiotic relationship with the Eltham Copper larvae. The ECB lays its eggs under the earth near the Sweet Bursaria and through complex pheromone communication the Noctonus ants take these eggs into their nests close by to provide protection for the developing larvae. At night they can be found escorting the larvae on their mission to consume the Sweet Bursaria leaves. Protecting the larvae from predators, the ants are rewarded with a sweet nectar-like substance that is secreted from glands on the larvae.

Many local environmental groups and council have contributed to plantings of Sweet Bursaria since the 1990s, boosting the chances of the ECBs survival. Local environment group 'Connecting Country' has an exciting project happening in 2023 to create links between existing communities of ECB and Bursaria with new plantings on private land. (2)

(1). Written and sung by local folk musician Jane Thompson. Eltham Copper Butterfly Festival was held at Edendale Farm, Eltham, 2015.

(2). Bursaria for butterflies: a new Connecting Country project for 2022-23 - Connecting Country