

WATTLES IN OUR AREA - DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

By Ros Gibson. Photos Margaret MacDonald

The genus name *Acacia* comes from the Greek, *akakia* or *akazo*, to sharpen.

Acacia has always been known in Australia, as 'wattle' because the branches were often interwoven and then sealed with mud to form the walls of early colonial houses. This form of construction was known in Europe as 'wattle and daub", but in Australia, the name became attached to the plant.

Acacias are generally woody plants with small cream to yellow flowers in soft balls or spikes. The many stamens completely hide the other floral parts. The seeds develop in pods (typical of legumes).

The four wattles described here, all have phyllodes (modified leaf stems) that act as leaves, and flowers in balls.

Some other species retain their feathery immature leaves.

***Acacia myrtifolia* Myrtle Wattle**

This species is named for the similarity between the shape of its phyllodes and the leaves of the genus *Myrtus*. The short, stiff phyllodes are asymmetrical with a prominent midrib and yellow margins and the branchlets are ribbed and usually red. Flowering from late winter to spring, its strongly scented, globular bright golden yellow flower-heads are clustered amongst the foliage. The narrow, erect pods are straight. It grows as an understory shrub in woodland areas



Myrtle Wattle



Golden Wattle

***Acacia pycnantha* Golden Wattle**

A small erect or spreading tree. Found in a wide variety of habitats, it is Australia's floral emblem. The long leathery phyllodes have a prominent midrib and distinct lateral veins. Its large, profuse, dense, globular, bright gold flower heads are strongly scented and attached by short stalks to a straight flower stem. Golden Wattle flowers from August to October, and then has long, thin, flattish and slightly constricted seed pods.

***Acacia suaveolens* Sweet Wattle**

This is the first of the indigenous wattles to flower in our district each winter and occurs in open forests and heathy woodlands. An open spreading shrub to two metres, it has narrow leathery bluish-green phyllodes and clusters of sweet-perfumed pale cream flowers. Its distinctive pods are oblong and purple-blue coloured. It is found in open forests and heathy woodland.



Sweet Wattle

***Acacia verniciflua* Varnish Wattle**



Varnish Wattle

The 'common variant' of this species is found in our district. It is a small, slender, slightly weeping, open tree. The narrow, light green phyllodes have two distinct veins on the upper surface and are shiny and sticky (like varnish). In late winter and spring, deep-yellow globular flower-heads occur in the phyllode axils, attached by longish stalks. The pods are thin and leathery.

Approximately 25 *Acacia* species are indigenous to this area, but there are also introduced species that have become serious environmental weeds. A particular problem plant is the hybrid between Coast Wattle and Sallow Wattle.