



Black Tea Tree

ID # 140



Anecdote or truth?



It is believed the common name "tea-tree" has been applied to species in the genera *Leptospermum*, *Melaleuca*, *Kunzea*, and *Baeckea* because the sailors on the Endeavour made tea that smelled like nutmeg from the leaves of the tree from one of these groups as a replacement for tea *Camellia sinensis* during Captain James Cook's 1770 voyage to Australia.

Uses

Methyl eugenol, an essential oil, is obtained from the leaves and can be used in perfumery and soaps and also as an ingredient in order to increase the potency of some insecticides.

The tree can be used to provide shelter and for erosion control on stream banks and in gullies. The wood is durable so it can be used for posts and poles.

Indigenous Uses

It has been used in smoking medicine in the Northern Territory and for making various household items.

Family: *Myrtaceae*

Genus: *Melaleuca*

Botanic name: *Melaleuca bracteata*

Melaleuca is derived from the Ancient Greek *mélas* meaning "dark" or "black" and *leukós* meaning "white" apparently because one of the first specimens described had fire-blackened white bark. The specific epithet *bracteata* is derived from the Latin word *bractea* meaning "bract" and refers to the flower clusters.

Melaleuca bracteata was first described in 1858 by Ferdinand von Mueller in *Fragmenta Phytographiae Australiae* from a specimen collected near Moreton Bay in Queensland.

Also known as: Black tea-tree, river tea-tree or mock olive

Origin: Endemic to Northern Australia (Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory). Widespread in NSW north from the Macleay River.

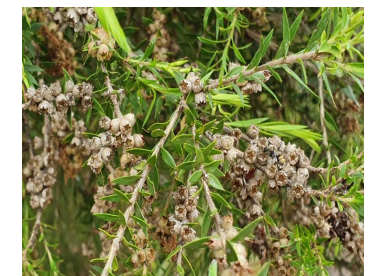
Habitat: Along watercourses or on heavier inland soils in depressions.

Description: Shrub or tree up to 10-15m high with hard, dark grey fissured bark.

Leaves are dark green, oval, about 2mm wide and up to 30mm long with longitudinal veins and oil dots on the surface. They are scattered along the branches. Each leaf is equipped with a sharp point.

Flowers are loosely arranged in clusters to form cylindrical or ovoid spikes, 30–90mm long by about 15mm across, coloured cream or white. Flowering occurs from spring to early summer and is followed by fruit which are more or less spherical to oval or barrel-shaped, about 3mm in diameter, sparsely arranged along the branches.

Birds, bees and other insects feed on the nectar.



Propagation and cultivation: It is adaptable in cultivation and a number of cultivars have been developed.

Sources:

- <https://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Melaleuca~bracteata>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melaleuca_bracteata
- http://www.canbr.gov.au/cpbr/cd-keys/RFK7/key/RFK7/Media/Html/entities/Melaleuca_bracteata.htm
- <https://austplants.com.au/Melaleuca-bracteata-Black-Tea-Tree>