



Black Wattle



Historical misnomer



Photographer Henry Beaufoy Merlin took this image of some women outside a wattle and daub hut in Hill End in 1871. National Archives of Australia.

Callicoma serratifolia is a plant of historical interest. Its timber was one of the first timbers used for the “wattle and daub” huts built by the early settlers as it was common at that time around Sydney Cove.

Despite its name, it is not a “wattle.” It was given the name because of the close resemblance of its flowers to those of *Acacia*, a name which is now applied more appropriately to some true *Acacia* species. To add to the confusion, there several similar trees in the *Acacia* species also known as Black Wattle.

Propagation and cultivation

Ripe seeds germinate readily when fresh. They are reported to grow best in well composted soil with plenty of moisture, preferring a shady position while the seedlings are young. They can also be grown from cuttings treated with a suitable rooting hormone.

Family: *Cunoniaceae*

Genus: *Callicoma*

Botanic name: *Callicoma serratifolia*

Callicoma from Greek – *kalos* = beauty and *kome* = hair (referring to its attractive fluffy flowers); *serratifolia* from Latin – *serratus*, saw-toothed and *folius*, a leaf referring to the serrated margins of the leaf

Also known as: Silver-leaf Butterwood, *Talgerruing* (an indigenous name reported to be from the Camden region)

Origin: Australia, where it is the only species in this genus. The first published description of the species in 1809 is attributed to Henry Cranke Andrews.

Habitat: Coastal NSW, extending to the mountains, from Bateman’s Bay/Braidwood area north to the south-east corner of Queensland. In, and particularly on the margins of rainforests, it is common along creeks and in rocky gullies.

Description: A tall bushy shrub or small tree, usually growing to about 12m, but occasionally reaching 20m high and 3m wide. The bark is rough and dark brown with a pinkish-brown inner layer. The leaves are a distinctive feature, being dark green and shiny above and a pale colour with whitish or rust coloured hairs and prominent veins on the under-side. Lance-shaped and with serrated edges, the leaves are generally 4-15cm long and 3-5cm wide.



Pale yellow fluffy flowers, 1-2cm across in globular heads on stalks that are 1-2.5cm long, usually at the end of the branchlets, occur in October and November and resemble *Acacia* flowers (leading to the name “wattle”). The fruits are small hairy capsules produced in clusters, with each containing a number of small seeds. These are released when ripe, usually between December and January.



Uses: Ants, bees and wasps are all attracted to the plant. The tannins in its bark are valued as a curing and tanning agent in leather. The wood burns very hot, such that it was used (with some caution because of the heat generated) as fuel in bakery ovens.



Sources:

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