

Bursaria spinosa

Common name – Christmas Bush

Bursaria spinosa are medium to large shrubs or small trees, growing to 5–10 metres; the coastal forms are taller, while those found in subalpine areas can be almost prostrate. They are common understory shrubs of eucalyptus woodland, and often colonise disturbed areas. They can be multi-stemmed and have a fibrous root system. The branches can have small, sharp spines, providing protection for smaller birds. They are fairly hardy and grow in sunny to lightly shaded areas. They do not require much maintenance, growing in most conditions and living for 25 to 60 years and can resprout from their woody base after bushfire and other disturbances.

They occur mainly in the eastern and southern half of Australia and provide an important food for several species of butterflies, moths, and native bees.

Flowers

The flowers are creamy-white, sweetly scented, about 7-10 mm in diameter. They are produced in densely branched flower heads. Flowers are usually seen in mid-summer, around Christmas time, which gives rise to the common name of ‘Christmas Bush’ in South Australia. Flowers are followed by a mass of flattened, purse-shaped seed capsules, (fruits) about 10 mm x 10 mm. When mature, these rattle in the wind giving rise to one of its other common names - Castanet Bush. The seeds are spread by the wind.



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Leaves

The leaves are an elongated oval shape 20-45 mm long and up to 12 mm wide. The upper surface of the leaves is green with a hairy underside.



Leaves of the Christmas Bush

Uses

The leaves contain a secondary compound called aesculin that was exploited as an ingredient in sunscreens in the 1940s and is used in medical research today.

Interesting Facts

Overall, *Bursaria spinosa* is an interesting and attractive native species and is an important source of nectar, especially for butterflies and other insects. Other common names are Native Blackthorn and Sweet Bursaria

Bursaria - Latin ‘bursa’, for bag or purse (the heart-shaped seed capsules); **spinosa** - spines often present on the branches.