



Plant of the month: *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *sophorae* Coastal Wattle



Coastal Wattle *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *sophorae* is a low-growing, spreading shrub or small tree to five metres high that is common at Venus Bay and as its name suggests is widespread in coastal areas of Australia's south-east. Like other flat-leaved wattles, the thick, yellow-green 'leaves' of this wattle are really flattened, modified leaf stalks or *phyllodes* that provide the same function as leaves. In this case they grow up to 12 cm long x 3.5 cm wide narrowing to a rounded tip, with 2-5 prominent parallel veins. Flowers are in golden-yellow cylindrical spikes to 5 cm long and appear July to September. The seed pods are curved or coiled when young and become very contorted or twisted after opening.

Coastal Wattle is useful for sand stabilisation on beaches. It grows quickly, binding sand and fixing nitrogen with its roots, as well as providing shelter - making it a very useful pioneer plant to help re-establish native sand-dune plant communities. Although it is native or indigenous to this area it can become weedy if planted outside its natural range and may invade heathland, woodland and grassland, so it is important not to plant it in areas where it might become an environmental weed. Its cousin Sallow Wattle *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *longifolia* belongs in forested areas usually further inland and has become invasive in areas of South Gippsland. The protein-rich seeds were steamed in their pods when green and eaten by the Aborigines. Propagation is from seed that has been treated to soften its hard coating.

Wattles are legumes (plants that bear their seeds in pods) and are the best-known members of the Mimosaceae family. The genus *Acacia* gets its name from the Greek 'akakia' or 'akazo' to sharpen. There are around 1200 *Acacia* species worldwide, 950 in Australia and 104 in Victoria. The species name *longifolia* comes from 'folium', leaf and *sophorae* from the Arabic, 'sofaira', meaning yellowish.

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