Plant of the Month - May

by Allan Carr

Dodonaea triquetra   **Forest Hop Bush**

Pronunciation: doh-doh-NEE-a   try-QUET-ra   SAPINDACEAE

Derivation: *Dononaea*, after Rembert Dodoens, sixteenth century Flemish botanist whose name was latinized to Dodonaeus; ***triquetra***, from the Latin, *triquetris* – triangular, a reference to the three-winged capsule.

Leaves, fruits   Male Flowers   Female Flowers

The genus Dodonaea has about 69 species of which 60 are endemic in Australia. This species was grown in England in 1790. As a group Dodonaeas have the common name hop bushes, gained from the decorative capsules resembling hops used in brewing beer.

Description: *D. triquetra* is a small to medium open shrub to 3 m by 1.5 m found in the forest under storey from Bundaberg, Qld to Orbost, Vic. Young branchlets are reddish-brown and angular or flattened. Host plant for Fiery Jewel butterfly (*Hypochrysops ignita*).

Leaves, to 120 mm by 35 mm are alternate, glossy dark green above and slightly paler below. They have a prominent central nerve and margins are entire to wavy. Some descriptions of shape from various regions are - 'oblong to *lanceolate', '*elliptic, sometimes *lanceolate or *ovate', 'tapering shortly to a point' so it seems they can be quite variable. These leaves were chewed by Aboriginal people as a painkiller for toothache and chewed leaves were used in the treatment of stonefish and stringray wounds.

Flowers are small and green in terminal *panicles on separate male and female plants. These inconspicuous flowers have no nectar to attract pollinators but the absence of petals allows pollen to be distributed by wind. To Aboriginal people flowering time, usually June to October, signalled that oysters were at their best.

Fruits are fragile capsules with three rounded wings in clusters of 12 or more on the female plants. They change from green to yellowish-brown or purple at maturity when they turn dry and papery and split to expel the brown, shiny seeds.

*lanceolate = lance-shaped, widest below the middle

*elliptic = oval, widest at the centre

*ovate = egg-shaped

*panicle = a branched flower stem   Fruits